

# center for PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE



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### *Chemistry : an ontology-free science ?*

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It is often assumed that chemistry is a typical positivistic science as long as chemists have been using atomic and molecular models as mere fictions and denying any concern with their real existence. Even when they use notions such as molecular orbitals chemists do not reify them and often claim that they are mere models or instrumental artefacts.

However a glimpse on the history of chemistry in the *longue durée* suggests that such denials of the ontological status of chemical entities do not testify for any specific allegiance of chemists to positivism. Rather in order to understand the ontological assumptions of chemists, we have to take into account their major concern : i.e. making up things.

The paper based on historical data will try to make sense of the long tradition in chemistry of ontological non-commitment. I will argue that what is usually considered as a denial of the existence of the basic units of matter would be better characterized as a focus on more important actors on the chemical stage.



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